



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

June 7, 2018

The Honorable Dan Donovan
U.S. House of Representatives
1541 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Donovan:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Commission's efforts to enhance the efficacy of the Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) system. WEA messages are one of several key tools to warn the public of imminent danger when disaster strikes. As you write, WEA messages were used twice by the New York City Emergency Management Department (NYCEM) during the Chelsea, Manhattan bombing in 2016.

Since 2008, consistent with the Warning, Alert, and Response Network (WARN) Act, the Federal Communications Commission has been working to improve the WEA system and increase the precision of geo-targeted alerts. Nonetheless, we've heard from many jurisdictions like NYCEM that WEA lacks granularity—that is, people may receive the alert even though they're located well outside of an intended target area. That's why the Commission in January adopted new rules to require participating wireless providers to deliver alerts to match 100% of the target area that overlaps with the wireless provider's network coverage area, with an overshoot of no more than one-tenth of a mile. And we require them to do so by November 2019—a timetable that all stakeholders agree is aggressive, and one that the evidence before us showed was achievable. I also agree with you that I hope at least the larger wireless carriers will beat that deadline.

This rule, coupled with the other improvements we have adopted for WEA—enabling consumers to retrieve alerts for 24 hours after they are received, clarifying the difference between providers participating in WEA “in part” versus “in whole,” affirming the deadline for implementing longer, 360-character length messages, and allowing WEAs to include embedded URLs—will strengthen the WEA system and keep Americans safer. I should note as well that support for Spanish-language alerts is on its way, and the FCC's Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau recently sought to refresh the record on the inclusion of multimedia in WEA messages.

We share a goal of giving our public safety officials the best tools available to carry out their mission. Thank you for your interest, and let me know if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ajit V. Pai". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "A".

Ajit V. Pai